

# Nadler Reiterates Urgency for Prompt Testing and Remediation of PCBs in NYC Schools

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NEW YORK, NY - Today, Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) reasserted the urgent need for the City of New York to test and remediate its public schools for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in 2 to 5 years - a position supported by the EPA - and not the 10 years proposed by the City. A longtime leader in the campaign to remove PCBs from New York City schools, Nadler also took umbrage at the Department of Education's assertion that, "there is NO test result number that would be high enough to close a school." At a City Council oversight hearing on the Mayor's PCB remediation plan, Nadler submitted the following testimony:

"In February of this year, the City of New York announced a comprehensive plan to remediate polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from 772 public schools throughout the five boroughs. This was major progress in a years-long campaign that I have been part of from the beginning, together with a coalition of parents, advocates, union members, and other elected officials. Along with securing active oversight from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), I led the New York City Congressional delegation in calling for increased testing and prompt remediation of our schools. The subsequent tests carried out by EPA produced incontrovertible evidence that hundreds of schools are contaminated at levels dramatically above federal guidelines.

"I am pleased that we have finally taken a first major step toward addressing this danger in the City's schools. In agreeing to a comprehensive remediation, the City has at last acknowledged the health threat posed by PCB-laden light ballasts on school children, teachers and staff and has affirmed that inaction is no longer an option.

"Unfortunately, the City's plan proposes replace the light ballasts in an astounding 10 years. Ten years is an intolerable window of exposure for children, and I have called repeatedly for a maximum time frame of 2-5 years to complete the remediation.

"The EPA, the nation's foremost authority on PCB contamination and remediation, is firmly on our side. Judith Enck, the EPA's regional administrator for New York, has asserted plainly that 'ten years is too long,' and has publicly called for a five year time frame. Ten years falls far short of treating the health risks with the seriousness and urgency that our school kids deserve. We simply cannot allow class after class of children to sit in these classrooms for the next decade.

"Every month, we have seen more schools tested, only to reveal staggering levels of PCBs. In one of those schools, P.S. 306 in Brooklyn, tests of several rooms revealed PCBs at over one million parts per million, which makes the sample pure PCBs.

"The dangers of PCB exposure are well-documented, and the science is crystal clear - so much so that Congress banned the chemicals in 1976. PCBs are a known neurotoxin and a fertility toxin, making exposure for children and pregnant women particularly dangerous. The EPA, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, and the National Toxicology Program of the National Institute of Health have all determined that PCBs are a probable human carcinogen. Expert environmental health physicians and scientists have linked PCBs to cardiovascular, endocrine, immune and cognitive disabilities.

"Prenatal and early childhood exposure shows serious risks, including ADHD, increased aggression, and the concerns already mentioned. Children can be exposed to PCBs by breathing contaminated air, in addition to ingesting PCB-contaminated food and coming into physical contact with PCBs. The longer that a child breathes air containing these toxins, the more intense their exposure becomes, and the more risk they bear of developing a serious health condition - or simply of not reaching their full developmental potential.

"I believe that it is critical that the PCBs be remediated in our children's schools far more quickly than the decade currently proposed by the City. I certainly understand the logistical work required to test and remediate nearly 800 schools. However, we cannot treat our children as guinea pigs and ignore the dangers of long-term exposure. Once the initial RFPs are released and templates are created, which should - according to the City's plan - happen within 2011, the pace of remediation should accelerate significantly over the City's proposal.

A time frame of two to five years is more than reasonable, given the willingness of both the EPA and the New York State Power Authority to provide technical assistance, the existence of energy service companies (ESCOs) that are willing to consult on and complete the remediation, and - most importantly - the urgency of dealing with these dangerous chemicals.

"Additionally, in an effort to help cities like ours finance the substantial cost of remediating PCBs, I have introduced federal legislation - the Safe Schools, Health Kids Act with Reps. Joe Crowley (D-Queens) and Jose Serrano (D-Bronx) - which would provide one possible avenue. This federal legislation could augment a variety of existing funding sources, including contracting with the ESCOs which are eager to provide up front funding and realize profits through energy efficiency savings from the replacement of the old energy-guzzling light fixtures.

"There are some good things about the City's plan that should remain in place as we accelerate the pace of the project: We must, as the plan proposes to do, prioritize the replacement of leaking ballasts. And we must prioritize schools based on their population and the years built, all of which may affect levels of PCB exposure and the impacts on the students. Older ballasts are more likely to develop leaks, and the younger children are when exposed, the more dangers PCB pose, as reflected in the EPA's higher standards for air safety for younger children.

"We cannot wait ten years for the amelioration of these hazardous chemicals in our children's schools. PCBs must be removed quickly and efficiently. Long term delays in the face of established science are disconcerting, and remind me of the years following the attacks of 9/11 when irresponsible authorities - both City and federal - told us the air around Ground Zero was safe to breathe, when it obviously was not. As I said repeatedly for nearly ten years after 9/11, government should have been the people's protector then, and I insist that it learn history's lessons by acting honestly and appropriately now."

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